

Assimilating Immigrants

Why America Can and
France Cannot

Robert A. Levine



EUROPE

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OP-132-RC

July 2004

20041008 394



RAND EUROPE

This research in the public interest was supported by RAND, using discretionary funds made possible by the generosity of RAND's donors and the fees earned on client-funded research.

ISBN: 0-8330-3669-6

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Published 2004 by the RAND Corporation
1700 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138
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201 North Craig Street, Suite 202, Pittsburgh, PA 15213-1516
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Preface

The large-scale immigration of Mexicans and other Latin Americans into the United States has stimulated a debate on America's ability to assimilate them. A parallel debate in Europe, particularly France, concerns the ability of that continent and that nation to assimilate the similar ingress of Muslims from North Africa and elsewhere. This occasional paper uses the history of mass immigrations into the United States to examine the two current streams and the two debates. It concludes that today's Mexican inflow differs little from past mass immigrations into the United States by the Irish, the Jews, and the Italians and that assimilation should be as successful as in the past. France, however, while it has successfully assimilated a wide variety of individuals, has had no previous mass immigrations, and its current direction is likely to lead to increasing problems. The paper suggests a "steady as she goes" course for the United States, and some policy changes that may help France cope.

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Acknowledgments

This occasional paper benefited greatly from comments by and dialogs with a wide range of readers of earlier drafts: active and retired RAND colleagues in the United States and Europe (James Kahan, Nelson Lim, Kevin McCarthy, Anthony Pascal, and Georges Vernez); Americans living in France (Robert Donahue and William Pfaff); and French colleagues (Ghislain de Langre, Marianne Debouzy, and Juliette Minces). Particular thanks are due to Odette van de Riet of RAND Europe, who supervised the extensive review of the paper.

The resulting product is, of course, the sole responsibility of the author.

Assimilating Immigrants: Why America Can and France Cannot

The persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages. Unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream American culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves—from Los Angeles to Miami—and rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream.

—Samuel P. Huntington (2004)

The universal assumption of Americans has always been that immigrants came to the United States to become (or see their children become) culturally assimilated Americans. Americans took for granted that assimilation was essential to national unity The French position has always been that nationality is indifferent to race or origin, but is cultural and can be acquired. It has been the European country most open to immigration, but the most insistent on assimilation.

—William Pfaff (2004)

America's history of immigration and the assimilation of immigrants has become a reference point in two separate policy controversies, one in the United States, the other in Europe—particularly France. Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington is the latest and the highest-profile critic of the *de facto* open door to Latino immigration. William Pfaff, a Paris-based syndicated columnist, has interpreted for Americans the French controversy over Muslim immigration, a controversy reflected throughout Western Europe.

The contention here is that Huntington is wrong about both the American past and the future; Pfaff oversimplifies the American experience—the melting-pot ideal that “Americans took for granted” never represented reality—but he is right about France. Latino immigration into the United States differs little from previous waves of mass ingress and is no more threatening. Each wave has changed American culture, which long ago transcended the Anglo-Protestantism on which it was initially based; none of them has eroded basic constitutional institutions or freedoms.

French experience is different. The central difference—between the United States and France and between France's past and its future—lies in numbers. France absorbs individuals into its classic culture; until the current ingress of North African Muslims, it had not experienced mass immigration, and neither its beliefs nor its policies have adapted to the new wave. The United States has absorbed mass migrations over a several-generation period and has continually adapted its own culture and policies. The difference does not make either

country morally or politically “better” or “worse” than the other, but American practice is likely to preserve its essential institutions; unless France changes direction, the difference may lead to dire consequences for that admirable nation.

Other member states of the European Union are making their own adaptations. To the extent that they emulate French rigidity, they run the same dangers. If enough of them run parallel courses, the Union itself will face major problems.

Misunderstanding of goals and possibilities has stemmed in part from the lack of any agreed definition for assimilation. The strongest version has newcomers becoming almost indistinguishable from natives—the true melting pot. The weakest definition requires little more than sufficient similarity and overlap between new and old to keep the peace.

The strong definition has provided the ideal both for Americans, as characterized by Huntington and Pfaff, and for the French: In both cases, reality has come close to the ideal for individual immigrants; in neither has it done so for mass migrations. American reality, however, beginning more than a century and a half ago, found a middle version—less like the melting pot than a soup with many ingredients, enriching the basic stock and replete with delectable solid tidbits, old and new.

The next part of this analysis reviews two waves of immigration into the United States—the Irish of mid-19th century, and the Jews and Italians at the turn of the 20th century¹—and then examines the current influx of Latinos and Asians in the light of history. The analysis then uses the same frame of reference to examine the immigration of Muslims into France. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of the policy implications for both countries.

From the first 17th-century settlements in Virginia and Massachusetts, through the American Revolution, until the middle of the 19th century, the colonies and then the United States were essentially British. The combination of English from the southern portion of the island of Great Britain, Scots from the northern portion, and Scotch-Irish—Scotsmen who had settled or been settled in Ireland—fit well into Huntington’s Anglo-Protestant model.² (Maryland was settled by English Catholics, but that exception highlights the rule.) Black slaves, of course, did not fit the Anglo-Protestant model, although most of them became Protestants, creating lively variations that blended in African traditions and the evangelical “Great Awakening” of the early 19th century. Their existence and numbers meant, in any case, that the country the immigrants entered was never simply “Anglo.” Even before the Civil War, the black influence was palpable, if in no other way because a significant segment of white discussion and literature focused on slavery and race.³

Before the mid-1800s, individual non-Anglo immigrants came from throughout Europe, assimilated, and disappeared into the general citizenry. Most of the immigrants were Protestants: Some, like the early Puritans, were rigid in their beliefs, but the variety of existing and imported denominations ultimately made mutual tolerance a necessity. That tolerance was extended only grudgingly to Catholics; the anti-Catholic “Know-Nothing” move-

¹ Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Central Europeans shared much of the experience of the Italians.

² Phillips (1999), although it focuses on differences within this model, is rich enough to convey a vivid picture of the model itself.

³ The black struggle against discrimination has been more difficult than that of any immigrant group, but black culture has always had an influence on American culture—for at least a century, a recognized influence.

ment entered the political spectrum, but neither Catholics nor Know-Nothings significantly perturbed the basic model of assimilation in the strong melting-pot definition.

The one group exception, in colonial times and in the first decades of the republic, consisted of Germans. Particularly in Pennsylvania from the early days of the colony, and later on in other pockets, including Texas, German enclaves retained their old-world language or variant dialects, such as Pennsylvania Dutch, and many of their old ways. Anglo-Americans worried about it. Before the Revolution, Benjamin Franklin grumbled that Pennsylvania "will in a few Years become a German colony. Instead of Learning our Language, we must learn theirs, or live as a foreign Country."⁴ Nonetheless, the numbers were small enough that the German immigrants caused few problems, even though some did assimilate slowly: German-speaking enclaves persisted at least until the anti-German hostilities that accompanied U.S. entry into World War I.

But then came:

The Irish

The Irish potato famine of 1845 changed the mix. The crop that supported Irish peasants failed; famine resulted; and the Irish began their worldwide emigration. Two million came to the United States in the 1840s, becoming almost 10 percent of the total U.S. population of 23 million reported by the Census of 1850. More than one quarter of the population of Boston was Irish-born.

The Irish did not assimilate easily. True, they were from northern Europe, but they were Catholics, and the rapid influx greatly strengthened the prejudices represented by the Know-Nothings. The new immigrants spoke English, but with a funny accent, and they even looked funny, as illustrated by newspaper cartoons of the day. They lived in their own neighborhoods and worked in their own economy, to some extent by their own choice, to some extent by the refusal of others to hire them except in menial positions—"No Irish need apply." By the time of the Civil War, 20 years after the first massive Irish entry, they remained largely unintegrated; the Union army had some Irish regiments, but far more characteristic were the largely Irish anti-draft riots in New York City.

Through the last half of the 19th century and into the 20th, Irish-Americans remained mainly in their own enclaves, building their own parochial school systems, including a remarkable number of Catholic colleges. By the early 20th century, they had also gained political power in many eastern cities (and the jobs that went with it). In 1905, John "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald, John Fitzgerald Kennedy's grandfather, became the first Irish mayor of Boston; this did not happen with the approval of the old families of Beacon Hill. In New York, Tammany Hall had been started by Anglo-Americans at the beginning of the 19th century; its notorious post-Civil War boss, William Tweed, was a Protestant; his successors after he went to jail were Irish.

The Irish entered the larger economy initially through public jobs. By the beginning of the 20th century, the Irish cop had become not merely typical, but traditional; police forces in eastern and other cities still remain heavily Irish, and so do large parts of municipal civil services. Assimilation was far from uniform, however. While large eastern and other cit-

⁴ Quoted in Morgan (2003), p. 72.

ies gained a significant Irish flavor and influence, that very fact strengthened hostility in rural areas and many smaller cities. In the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan, almost as anti-Catholic as it was anti-Negro, achieved substantial political power in the Midwest as well as the South.

Nonetheless, Irish political assimilation reached a national milestone in 1924, when Governor Al Smith of New York—fully Irish-Catholic-American, not a proxy Anglo—ran for the Democratic nomination for President. He lost, but in 1928 he won the nomination and then lost to Republican Herbert Hoover. His losses were due in some measure to KKK and other nativist anti-Catholic opposition, but the fact that he ran at all was a turning point. John Kennedy met some similar opposition in 1960, but after he won, the issue disappeared almost completely from politics. And by 1960, although some neighborhoods, such as South Boston, remained heavily Irish, most Irish-Americans lived and worked among other Americans without problems or distinctions. Many had intermarried with Protestants or other Catholics in any case.

But the society and culture the Irish have assimilated into is not the culture they entered in 1845. The assimilation process itself has made America partly Irish. The Irish cop became the norm, not only in cities but in national institutions, such as the FBI; Irish saloons burgeoned but then died back as a distinct genre during Prohibition. Roman Catholic churches, most of them established by the Irish and later enhanced by subsequent waves of Italians and central Europeans, and now by Latinos and Vietnamese, burgeoned; the Catholic hierarchy is still disproportionately Irish and is nationally powerful; St. Patrick's day has become a national and rather ecumenical celebration.

Unlike later groups of migrants, however, the Irish had little effect on American food. That seems unsurprising for a national cuisine that had consisted almost entirely of potatoes until the crop failed.

The Jews and the Italians

Jews first came to the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam in the 17th century, before it became New York; through the first part of the 19th century, the few Jews in the United States entered and assimilated on an individual basis. In the half-century starting about 1825, a more substantial number entered, mostly from Germany; some dispersed throughout the United States as itinerant or settled peddlers; some stayed in New York. In Chicago, as well as New York, some became quite rich and formed a mostly assimilated group respected by its peers; other towns had small and nonproblematic enclaves.

Starting about 1880, the migration—impelled largely by pogroms and other oppressions in the Russian “Pale of Settlement” (including parts of what are now Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Belarus) and other parts of Central and Eastern Europe—became massive. In 1925, there were 4.5 million Jews in a U.S. population that had numbered 106 million in the census of 1920.

A break in the stream of Jewish (and Italian) immigration began in 1925. The Immigration Act of 1924 had placed severe restrictions on further ingress, particularly of those whose “national origins” were other than the original Northwest European stock. This act of prejudice lasted 20 to 40 years: The horrors of the Holocaust opened the door to many survivors after World War II; the 1965 revision of the immigration laws abolished national origins as a criterion. One likely result of the break, however, was that it aided in the assimila-

tion of those who were already in the United States, a pause not available to the Irish before them or, almost certainly, to the Latinos later.

As with the Irish, the new Jewish immigrants settled into their own neighborhoods, mostly in New York and a few other eastern cities. As with the Irish, they faced religious, as well as ethnic, discrimination, although perhaps less than the Irish had initially. Unlike the Irish, Jewish Talmudic tradition led to a strong educational ethos, basic to the rapid progress of the new group. Education overcame the fact that, also unlike the Irish, they were not native to the English language; they had to learn it, and they did. For the immigrants, English remained a language second to Yiddish, and a vibrant Yiddish culture was created. The next generation spoke English but knew Yiddish—they had to talk to their parents; the next⁵ had lost its Yiddish, and that culture became historical and nostalgic.

Economically, the first generations supported themselves mainly in traditional Jewish occupations, particularly the manufacturing of clothing, in which Jews sat on both the management and labor sides of the bargaining table, and the wholesale and retail trade in clothing and many other commodities. Jews also penetrated deeply into entertainment and “invented Hollywood” (Gabler, 1998). In public jobs, as the Irish had become the cops, Jews became teachers but did so more slowly because, among other reasons, of the tenure held by Irish teachers.

Politically, Jews joined the city machines that had been dominated by the Irish and, in time, gained their own shares of power. The first Jewish mayor of New York, Abe Beame, was elected in 1974, with a lag after the beginning of the first wave somewhat longer than that between the Irish immigration and the election of Honey Fitz in Boston. The first Jewish candidate for national office, Senator Joseph Lieberman, lost the vice presidency in 2000 by several hundred votes in Florida, where thousands of votes in heavily Jewish areas had been miscast because of confusing ballots. Lieberman then lost the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004; both lags were a bit longer than Al Smith's. And it has hardly been considered worthy of mention that both senators from California are members of the legendary clan of Jewish grandmothers.

The pattern of gradual assimilation—supporting their own institutions and occupations while joining those of the mainstream, facing and fearing significant anti-Semitism—lasted through World War II. Then the combination of the positions already achieved, the shock with which all Americans learned of the Holocaust, and the creation of Israel accelerated full assimilation, which the Irish had achieved earlier. Jewish neighborhoods remained, sometimes attenuated, as with the Lower East Side of New York; sometimes renewed by the post-Holocaust immigration and then the flight from the Soviet Union; sometimes newly created, as in the west side of Los Angeles. The postwar Supreme Court decision outlawing restrictive covenants forbidding the sale of homes to Jews and others meant that Jews could move anywhere, which they did. And in addition to maintaining their positions in traditional economic activities, Jews have penetrated without much perturbation the most Anglo of American institutions, including the top levels of Ivy League universities, which had used quotas to constrain Jewish admissions not too long ago. All this has led to extensive intermarriage, which some Jewish leaders fear will end the separate existence of the Jewish community in the United States.

⁵ Including me.

As with the Irish, Jews have transformed American society and culture while joining it. American politics responds to Jewish concerns, particularly with regard to Israel; American pop culture, long managed in substantial measure by Jews, absorbed many Jewish elements (in recent years, however, overtaken by black Motown and hip-hop); "serious" American culture has moved from Mark Twain and Henry James to Phillip Roth and Saul Bellow. And the bagel has become more American than the doughnut.

Italian immigration to the United States paralleled Jewish immigration, in both time and numbers. Through the first century of the republic, Italians came and assimilated as individuals. In 1850, the revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi, temporarily defeated at home, became a refugee in the United States and, because he was a revolutionary in a country still savoring its own recent revolution, something of a hero. He soon returned to Italy and, over a period of years, won his revolution and unified Italy.

Garibaldi and the revolution had presented Italy to Americans in favorable terms, but he and the tens of thousands of Italians who arrived in that period were at least as different from those of the subsequent mass immigration as the German Jews of mid-century had been from the Russians who followed them.

The early Italians were largely cosmopolitans from the north; those in the wave that followed, starting in the mid-1880s, were peasants from the south—Naples, Calabria, and Sicily. Between the 1880s and the restrictions of the mid-1920s, about 7 million arrived, motivated mainly by the desire to escape the extreme poverty of the southern *Mezzogiorno*. Unlike the Jews, however, they could go home again, and 2 million or more did so. Although the count cannot be exact, the number of Italians and Italian-Americans in the 1925 population exceeded the number of Jews, by perhaps half.

Also like the Jews, the Italians settled mainly in their own neighborhoods in the big cities of the east. The Jewish immigrants, however, had worked in urban occupations, such as tailoring and trade—and Talmudic scholarship—even in their *shtetls* in the small towns of the Pale; few had tilled the soil. Most of the southern Italians had been farm laborers, which did not prepare them for life in New York and Philadelphia.⁶

These vastly different backgrounds largely accounted for the significantly different rates and patterns of assimilation between the two groups. The Jews moved up fast, in managerial and ownership positions, initially within their own communities. The Italians started out as unskilled manual laborers in construction and other industries. True, the earlier Irish immigrants had stemmed from similar peasant backgrounds: They had also been laborers, but politics, police, and civil service had provided upward mobility for those with more or less English. The language barrier, together with the Irish monopolies established in the half-century before the Italians showed up, limited these routes for the latter.

Little love was lost between the Irish and the Italians, although both were Roman Catholic. The membership of the Catholic Church in the United States became far more heterogeneous than it had been before the 1880s, but the parishes were seldom mixed; they were Irish or Italian or Polish, Croatian, or Hungarian; in some old communities, such as the mining towns of Pennsylvania, they remain so. And the hierarchy remained heavily Irish, a predominance that is still echoed by the fact that more prelates can be identified by their Irish names than by those of any other ethnicity. Even so, the Italians were better off for the

⁶ Some Italians did become farm laborers and later farm owners in California and fishermen in San Francisco. Some worked in the mines of Pennsylvania and elsewhere, although proportionally fewer than central Europeans.

fact that they did not face something like the anti-Semitism Jewish immigrants felt; while by no means fully accepted, Catholicism had already been woven into the Anglo-Protestant fabric.

The result of the balancing out of the differences between the two groups that arrived in America at the same time—particularly of the difference in their European background—was that more Jews moved up faster, off the bottom and into the educated, professional and managerial, and well-off middle and upper middle classes. Both Jews and Italians, for example, worked in the New York City garment trades, but the Jews organized the unions; the Italians joined them. Another indicator can be taken from the underclass: In spite of the true and fictional tales of the Mafia, both Jews and Italians were well represented in the slum-bred underworld through and after World War II. But the last Jewish godfather, Meyer Lansky, died in 1983 after a peaceful retirement; the archaic remnants of the Mafia are still being pursued and their members convicted or murdered. In some places they are being replaced by newly immigrated Russian Jews.

Overall, however, by the middle of the 20th century, the Italians had caught up, becoming a fully assimilated group in the American pattern. Italian-American enclaves remained, but the old urban "Little Italies" were mostly nostalgic relics. Residential diffusion and intermarriage mixed Italian-Americans with other populations, and they were well represented at all occupational levels. Although, as noted below, the number of Jews in Congress has surpassed the number of Italians, the first Italian-American mayor of New York, Fiorello LaGuardia, preceded the Jewish Beame by 40 years (but La Guardia's mother was Jewish). Geraldine Ferraro was the losing Democratic vice presidential candidate 16 years before Lieberman.

And, as with the other groups, as Italians assimilated into American culture, American culture became Italianized. Some aspects of Italianization—opera and pizza—are worldwide. But Frank Sinatra, Robert DeNiro, Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, and *The Godfather*, *The Sopranos*, and all the other Mafia sagas are strictly American. And Spaghetti-O's and Chef Boyardee canned pastas are part of the normal national cuisine.

The assimilation experience of the three groups is encapsulated in congressional statistics: The current House of Representatives has 26 Jews and 25 Italian-Americans⁷; nobody bothers to count the Irish any more. But more revealing are the differences between the rates of change in the House and the Senate, which provide insights into what political assimilation means and the rate at which it takes place. It is relatively easy for individual congressional districts to become dominated by ethnic majorities and to elect their representatives accordingly. But none of the three immigrant groups has achieved a majority in any state, and thus election to the Senate of group members marks a more substantial degree of acceptance and assimilation.

The premigration Senates had a few Irishmen and two Jews, one of whom later became Secretary of the Treasury of the Confederacy; they were part of the then-normal individual assimilation process. After the migrations began, however, congressional elections took on a different character. Irish representatives were soon returned from Massachusetts and New York, but it was not until the first decade of the 20th century, 60 years after the beginning of the mass migration, that the fifth Irish-American senator (not five in one Senate

⁷ As counted by Jewish- and Italian-American organizations.

but five cumulatively since 1845) was elected.⁸ Then the numbers began to mount: the tenth senator in the 1920s; 25 by the 1940s, 100 years after the start of Irish America. By the 1970s, the cumulative increase began to slow down; nobody was noticing Irishness any more. Full assimilation had taken 80 to 100 years.

The Jewish experience was parallel. The tenth Jewish senator after the start of mass migration was elected in the 1970s, 90 years after the beginning; but ten more were elected in the next two decades, a bit longer than a century after the migration began. In the 1990s, seven Jews were elected to the Senate for a cumulative total of 26; Jewish organizations noticed, but few others did or cared. Full assimilation had come at about the same rate as the Irish. The cumulative number of Italian-Americans was smaller, about ten, which is a mark of the more-rapid Jewish entry into the topmost levels.

Each wave has been different in major particulars—language, religion, education, ability to return to the home country—and each has encountered major prejudices and obstacles. Nonetheless, a strong common pattern has emerged: gradual assimilation of immigrant waves, achieved through *mutual* adaptation by both the immigrants and the receiving—and thus constantly changing—culture. Huntington's contention that "Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream American culture" is wrong both in its interpretation of what that culture is and in not allowing the new wave the time it has taken the earlier groups to assimilate. The next section takes a closer look at the Latino wave and the smaller Asian influx.

The New Wave: Latinos and Asians

The first observation is that the new wave is not—or at least not yet—as high as the old. The 1890 census reported that 14.8 percent of the population was composed of immigrants; in 2000, the percentage was 11.2. The United States may be headed in that direction, but there is a way to go.

The second observation is that neither the Latino nor the Asian groups are homogeneous. The Irish were; in spite of some differences stemming from their countries of origin, the Jews of the mass migration were; and the Italians were.

The 37.4 million people of Hispanic origin in the United States in 2002 included⁹

- 25.0 million with Mexican ancestry
- 5.3 million from Central and South America, mostly Central America
- 3.2 million in or originating from Puerto Rico
- 1.4 million Cuban-Americans
- 2.4 million others.

The 11.9 million Asian-Americans in 2000 were even more fractionated. They included¹⁰

- 2.8 million with Chinese, including Taiwanese, roots

⁸ Unlike the Jewish- and Italian-American data, the estimates from the Irish are based on a scanning of the list of senators for Irish names. They are thus inexact, and probably understate, but that is not crucial to the point being made on the timing of assimilation. The Jewish data are from Jewish-American organizations, the Italian data mix both modes.

⁹ The words *Hispanic* and *Latino* are used interchangeably in this discussion. The data were calculated from the U.S. Census Bureau (2003).

¹⁰ From the 2000 Census. The individual categories contain double counts because of mixed ancestry.

- 2.4 million Filipinos
- 2.2 million from the Indian subcontinent, mostly from India, but also Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh—all very different
- 1.2 million Japanese-Americans
- 1.2 million Korean-Americans
- 1.2 million Vietnamese-Americans.

These are very different groups.

Among the Hispanics, most Mexican immigrants have been dirt farmers or small villagers. Cuban-Americans fleeing Castro—particularly the first wave—were predominantly middle class. And most Puerto Ricans, who are not immigrants at all since Puerto Rico is part of the United States, come from or remain in cities—many from the slums of San Juan, many now in the slums of northeastern cities.

As a result, according to Census Bureau tables, for Hispanics below the poverty level and for those earning more than \$35,000 a year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003),

- Mexicans are above the average for poverty, below for higher earnings.
- Puerto Ricans are well above the average in both groups; the group in between is thus small, proportionally.
- Cubans have many fewer poor and many more better off.

The Asians are even more heterogeneous. The Chinese group includes the descendants of Cantonese-speaking southerners who came to build the railroads, educated people speaking Cantonese or Mandarin who have entered more recently for further education and economic opportunity (like many Koreans), and some much-poorer illegal immigrants. Filipinos, with a long relationship to the United States, tend toward the middle class. Even though India is still predominantly a peasant society, most Indians who emigrate to the United States are well educated.¹¹ And the Vietnamese, like the Cubans, are fiercely anti-Communist refugees.

One possible, if nonquantifiable, generalization is that the new wave is divided into two segments resembling, in some ways, the Jews and the Italians. Cuban immigrants and their children, Chinese businesspeople, and the Chinese- and Indian-rooted children who take an extremely disproportionate number of the academic honors in California and elsewhere may be running in parallel to the relatively rapid rise of the Jews. Mexicans and others with farm labor and other lower-class origins may be following the slower path of the Italians with similar roots and similar economic motivations to come to America.

In any case, it is the Latinos who concern the fearful because of their numbers, and more specifically, the Mexicans because their lower-class origins made them appear less assimilable and because of Mexico's proximity.¹²

¹¹ The 1965 abolition of the national origins rules that had favored northern Europeans also encouraged educated immigrants who came and brought their families. More recently, the opportunities in information technology have attracted educated Asians.

¹² Some observers have worried that the south Florida Cubans' hatred of Castro and Communism has introduced a disciplined authoritarian political style into that state, but that seems to be attenuating in successor generations. South Florida Cubans remain predominantly conservative and Republican—balancing out south Florida Jews who remain predominantly liberal and Democratic. That is the American style of assimilation. Non-Cubans, who now form more than half of Florida's Latino population, vote with variety.

So it comes down to the Mexicans, who form the vast majority of Hispanics in the population and of the new immigrants coming in, legally or illegally. Two thirds of the Hispanics in the United States are of Mexican origin; the long border offers many, if chancy, opportunities for illegal, as well as legal, crossing. Unlike Cuba, the other proximate Hispanic country, and Puerto Rico, whose people can come to the 50 states at will, Mexico has a huge population reservoir to pump out emigrants. Finally, there is a long history of Spanish-become-Mexican settlement in areas later seized or bought by the United States, and later migration into these areas has established a dense network of cross-border connections. Neither is any pause, like the one that helped assimilate Jews and Italians, likely to slow the inflow of Mexicans. That pause was aided by the width of two oceans, much stronger barriers than the Rio Grande and border fences.

These are the reasons that Huntington and others who share his concerns focus on Mexican immigrants; Mexicans already in the United States; and, for some nativists, Mexican-Americans. Since the United States is already a century and a half away from its original Anglo-Protestant roots, however, the real question is whether the Mexican presence and entry will lead to changes in America's culture and institutions that are more radical and different in kind from those the Irish, Jews, and Italians wrought.

The answer presented here is "No." American culture and politics will absorb, change, and be changed by Mexicans and Mexican elements; that process has long since begun. But basic political institutions and rights will remain as they are and as they have been through the other waves of immigration. The evidence lies in the history of Mexican immigration—parallel, as noted, to the Italian one in particular—and in current data.

The Census of 1970 was the first to separate out the Hispanic population, enumerated in that year at 4.5 percent of the total, roughly two-thirds of which—about 3 percent of the total population—was of Mexican origin. Since the annexation of Texas and the conquests of the Mexican War had brought a substantial number of Mexicans into the American population, the 3 percent could not have been much of an increase over the percentages at that time, more than a century earlier. By 1980, however, the percentage had almost doubled; the mass migration began in that decade, and by 2000, residents of Mexican origin were enumerated at 8.8 percent of the total population of the United States.

Such a rate of growth is not unprecedented. The growth of the Latino population to almost 9 percent after a quarter-century of mass migration is faster than the 40 years it took the Jews and Italians combined to reach 10 percent, but it is much slower than the 10 percent in 10 years of the Irish.

True, the Mexican course has been different. Unlike any of the previous groups, the first wave went from the fields into the fields—from subsistence farms south of the border to migrant labor in the north. But it soon began to diffuse, first into the cities of the southwest. By the late 1990s, most of the service workers in Los Angeles were Mexicans or Mexican-Americans—the casual day laborers waiting for jobs on street corners, but also the plumbers, the electricians, the parking attendants, the busboys and many waiters in restaurants with a variety of ethnic cuisines, the health attendants and an increasing portion of the medical technicians, and the housekeepers and nannies. And by that time, Mexicans had begun to diffuse geographically too, gravitating to meat-packing plants in the Midwest and poultry processing in the South.

As noted, the bottom-upness has echoed the pattern of the Italians, who also entered as unskilled farm laborers. What is notable is that, after the historically short time of 25

years, diffusion has been up as well as out, particularly in successor generations. This is borne out by several facts and impressions.

The facts:

- According to a recent econometric analysis by RAND Corporation demographer James P. Smith (2003),

The conventional view regarding Hispanic immigrants' inability to secure a better life for their children and grandchildren has been pessimistic. They have been seen as not sharing in the successful European experience, perhaps due to a reluctance to assimilate into American culture. These fears are unwarranted: 2nd and 3d-generation Hispanic men have made great strides in closing their economic gaps with native whites. The reason is simple—each successive generation has been able to close the schooling gap with native whites which then has been translated into generational progress in incomes. Each new Latino generation not only had higher incomes than their forefathers, but their economic status converged toward the white men with whom they competed.¹³

- Mexican-Americans have caught up in politics at least as fast as the previous immigrant groups did. The fact that there have been several Mexican-American senators from New Mexico probably does not count: That state has a historical Mexican tradition deeper than any other. But the current House of Representatives has about a dozen Mexican-American members, many more than Jews or Italians had gained in the first 25 years after the beginning of mass migration. California, the state with the most Mexican-Americans, has state and local officials at all levels, up to lieutenant-governor and speaker of the assembly.
- Some Mexican-American politicians in California, in successor generations that have lost their Spanish just as Jewish generations lost their Yiddish, are having to relearn it for political purposes.

The impressions:

- Hispanic names are increasingly appearing in Los Angeles media in contexts having nothing to do with ethnic or class matters—as holders of ordinary white- or blue-collar private or public jobs, persons in the street, students, observers of newsworthy phenomena, and so forth. A typical piece in the *Los Angeles Times*, having nothing to do with ethnicity, makes the point: “corporate America ... relies on managers like Jaime Moncayo and Shawn Reeves ... two supervisors at the Simi Valley customer service center of mortgage lender Countrywide Financial Corp” (Streitfeld, 2004). Nothing worth commenting on about a Hispanic name in a middle-management position.
- In a 1973 study of Santa Clara County, California (at the start of its incarnation as Silicon Valley), a colleague and I reported that there were no ethnic Mexican college graduates in our countywide sample; only 19 percent had any college education, as compared with 59 percent for Anglos (Alesch and Levine, 1973). Twelve years later, however, Kevin McCarthy and Burciaga Valdez reported that “The Latino population [in California] is making good educational progress, and they are making it

¹³ The statement refers to Hispanics (or Latinos); the analysis was also done separately and holds up for those of specific Mexican origin.

more rapidly than they did 30 years ago" (McCarthy and Valdez, 1985, p. 29). Twenty years after that report, Hispanics are well represented if still proportionately underrepresented in the University of California and the California State University, and very much present in the two-year community college system in areas of the state with large Hispanic populations. In a relative sense, however, problems remain: Georges Vernez points out that "the college attendance and college completion gap between Hispanic and other students has been increasing" (Vernez, 2003, p. 18).

Not every aspect of Mexican immigration has a parallel in the earlier waves. In particular, the huge reservoir of potential migrants just across a frontier that remains porous to illegal immigration in spite of fences, agents, and aircraft means that change is likely to continue longer and end up greater than in the past. The facts and impressions cited above, however, suggest that such change will be no more disruptive or threatening to "the American way of life" than in the past. Mexican assimilation is taking place in patterns similar to those of the past, although perhaps full assimilation will take less than 100 years.

As a result, the cultural aspects of American life that have frequently been changed by migration are changing. But the cherished democratic institutions are not.

Hispanic culture has a head start stemming from the southwest's long history. To be sure, some of the history, such as the Hispanicization of California's native inhabitants and their forced conversion into "Mission Indians," is distasteful to modern sensibilities. Ironically, American Catholicism itself is now being Hispanicized, even while it struggles to retain Latinos, many of whom are converting to evangelical Protestantism. Other "traditional" institutions, such as the Mexican ranchos in California, were romanticized as they were being Americanized; nonetheless, they provided an early introduction of Hispanic culture. Now the taco has become ubiquitous throughout the United States, culinary salsa outsells ketchup,¹⁴ and musical salsa has expanded far beyond its Latino origins. And throughout the southwest at least, serious Mexican and other Hispanic art, Mexican literature in translation, and Mexican-American literature without translation have joined the national canon.

Which is precisely what upsets Huntington—as the addition of each new element to the Anglo-black-Protestant-Catholic-German-Irish-Jewish-Italian-Slavic-etc. culture that is now adding Latino elements has irritated those who thought it "pure" before the addition of each new ingredient. For true cultural preservationists, there can be no answer, as there could not be in the past; they will remain unsatisfied by anything less than assimilation in the strong definition. Many of us, however, can sit back and enjoy it.

More fundamental, in any case, is that America's basic political institutions are showing no evidence of changing now, any more than they changed in response to past immigrations. Hispanics, like their predecessors, have entered the constitutional structure, not challenged any of it. The 17-person Hispanic caucus in the House of Representatives presents no radical agenda.

The republic is not forever safe; it never has been. But among the threats stemming from economic competition and/or American entropy, political polarization, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism, Hispanicization looms small. The numbers of new immigrants, and their pressure on the environment in particular, may present real problems (while

¹⁴ Although as an example of reverse assimilation, my favorite Salvadorian restaurant in the San Fernando Valley has a small bottle of salsa and a big bottle of ketchup on every table.

their youthful demography may help compensate for the aging of America), but the ongoing changes in ethnic composition are neither novel nor threatening.

France: The Maghrebian Malaise

For the short run at least, our republic seems safe. Not so *la République*. France has had little success in assimilating the massive Muslim immigration from the *Maghreb*—the former French North African colonies of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia.¹⁵ In fact, it has not tried very hard, certainly not by allowing French culture to adapt to that of the immigrants. And with the Muslim population of France at 10 percent and growing, so is the threat.

As Pfaff (2004) pointed out in the opening quote, “France has been the European country most open to immigration but the most insistent on assimilation.” This contrasts in particular to Germany, where nationality was until recently “by right of blood”: Immigrants whose families have lived in Russia for generations and who speak only Russian are welcomed for their German genes and their presumed but frequently nonexistent cultural roots; long-term residents with roots even in Poland, let alone Turkey, are much less welcome. Ironically, Israel’s policy is similar to Germany’s.

Throughout its modern history, and even earlier, France has welcomed immigrants attracted to French culture, education, amenities, and economic opportunities. The immigration, and its general welcome by the host country, was similar in many ways to the United States before the coming of the Irish. After the Bolshevik and Nazi revolutions—and with the dreadful exception of the Vichy period—France became substantially open to refugees. Immigrants—Asians and African and American blacks, as well as Europeans—came as individuals and families, not *en masse*. The only requirement was that they become truly French as soon as possible—the strong definition of assimilation.

The traditional opening to the history portion of the standardized republican school curriculum—“*Nos ancêtres, les Gaulles*”—was learned by young Poles, Portuguese, and Senegalese, as well as by Parisians, Bretons, and Burgundians. French culture, guarded by *l’Académie Française*, felt little influence from Poland, Portugal, and Senegal. (In spite of *l’Académie*, it was affected mightily by American culture, but that was because of movies and television, not immigration.) What remained after a generation were Polish and Portuguese family names, when they had not been changed, but little more.

The Muslims among the immigrants practiced their religion freely, as did the Jews, except during Vichy. Since the Hexagon (European France, named after its shape on the map) had only 100,000 Muslims in 1945, they presented no problem. Algeria was legally part of postwar France, and during *les trente glorieuses*, the 30 years of rapid economic growth beginning after the war, Algerians were brought into European France particularly to work in the burgeoning automobile industry. Even so, in 1962, when Algeria became independent, the Hexagon had fewer than 500,000 Muslims.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Colonies* is a general term: Morocco and Tunisia were French “protectorates,” and the French considered Algeria to be part of France, although they certainly did not treat the Arab population as being simply French.

¹⁶ France does not gather statistics on religion. *The Daily Catholic*, an online American far-right, outside-the-Church, publication estimated that there were 400,000 Muslims in France in 1962 (Ciaccio, 2002). The estimate, designed to show rapid growth after that date, may be low, but an expert has confirmed the order of magnitude. The later estimates presented here are generally agreed to.

Then, *le déluge*. In 1962, President Charles de Gaulle ended eight years of bitter civil war in Algeria by withdrawing French claims and troops and recognizing Algerian independence. The simple description of the antagonists—the Muslim natives of Algeria versus the governing French authorities plus a million *colons*, people whose ancestors had been recruited from across the European shores of the Mediterranean, some many generations earlier—is too simple. Many Algerian soldiers—*harkis*—had fought on the French side; other Algerians had sympathized with the French, or were thought by the revolutionaries to have sympathized and had well-founded fears of retaliation in the postindependence chaos.

They came to France, which, if it did not exactly welcome the Muslim refugees, admitted them. Mass immigration accelerated rapidly in 1974; before that year, workers were free to come and go between France and Algeria, but the strong constraints on such movement imposed in 1974 had the ironic result of motivating Algerian workers to stay in France and bring their families with them. That, plus high birth rates, doubled the Muslim population to a million in the 11 years from 1962 to 1973, redoubled it by 1981, and then redoubled it again to 4 million in 1995. Ten percent—6 to 7 million Muslims—is the consensus of current estimates.

Like America's mass immigrants, the Muslims settle into their own enclaves—north-east Paris, much of Marseilles, and their inner suburban rings—the *banlieues*, composed largely of high-rise public housing slums. Although many *Maghrebians* have some French, their first language is different. Their culture is North African Arab, not French, and, like the Irish and the Jews, their religion is different.

With the continuing economic problems since the end of *les trente glorieuses*—unemployment, which had been below 5 percent, has fluctuated around 10 percent—economic absorption of the immigrants and their children has been slow at best, except for a fortunate few who have entered French culture through popular music or parallel channels, including adoption into the self-conscious intellectual class. And in any case, economic absorption, while necessary for assimilation in any definition, has never been sufficient, in France any more than in the United States, to achieve assimilation in the strong sense of near-total absorption for massive immigrations.

Culture and religion, compounded by the large numbers of immigrants and by the failure of the economy to provide for such numbers, have created an amplifying action-reaction sequence; French policy is, at best, providing no help.

Cultural differences run deep. French culture is the product of a long national and European history, which has created a very modern civilization with very ancient roots. After more than a millennium of Catholicism and more than a century of struggle over the role of the Church, culminating in a 1905 law establishing secularism, the last century has been officially and strongly secular but with many remaining Catholics and Catholic reminders. Not just Christmas and Easter, but a number of lesser religious occasions remain public holidays, for example, and every city and village has its old churches.

In contrast, despite the century of French occupation and influence in the *Maghreb*, and four decades of major Muslim residence in France, French Islam remains closer to its premodern model. Although religion as such is less pervasive than in the past and in some Muslim countries to the east, there has been no breakout toward secularism.

Some commentators note that a segment of French youth culture—some of it indeed with roots in the *Maghreb*—has broken out of the classical constraints imposed by Gallic ancestors. For most majority youth, however, such change attenuates as they grow up, start

work, and move back toward conventional norms, as in the United States. For young Muslims, rejected by the job market and the majority culture and plunged into the crime-and-drugs atmosphere that has become pervasive for at least the younger residents of the *banlieues*, reversion has been to Islamic culture, including some aspects that violate modern French (and indeed, other Western) mores, and sometimes to religious fundamentalism.

Even so, at least until recent outbreaks of Muslim frustrations based on internal and international events, the major ambition of most immigrants has been at least a degree of assimilation. As put by one French analyst, "Most of the immigrants ask only one thing, that they not be treated differently from the native population. ... They want to be treated as everyone else and live in their own traditions" (Minces, 2004b, quoted with permission).

But for the *Maghrebians* to live in their own traditions, France would have to either allow a major and continuing cultural exception or adapt its own culture, and it is willing to do neither.

The current battle over the just-passed law forbidding Muslim girls and women from wearing head scarves in public schools is symbolic of much more. The narrow issue is whether the women wearing the scarves bring a separate religious identity into schools designed to inculcate secularism. On one side of the explicit debate lies the importance to the French of established secularism; on the other side lie freedom of religion and Muslim doubts about the continuing Catholic tone of French secularism.

Underlying these principles, however, is the belief of many French that most Muslim women have been coerced into wearing the scarves by men maintaining—sometimes enforcing by fear—the rule of male superiority. Whether true or not, that belief runs across the French political spectrum; the writer espousing the right of immigrants "to be treated as everyone else and live in their own traditions," for example, is also the author of a newspaper column headlined "The Islamist Pressure," in which she asks the question, "The school scarf: act of faith?" Her answer is: "No. It is the result of pressure from Muslim men and boys" (Minces, 2004a).

Other issues involve genital mutilation of women (by no means a universal Muslim practice), the humane slaughter of animals, and even the increasing numbers of domed mosques in areas dominated by steepled churches (in which few people attend mass). The principles invoked—gender equality, secularism, humanitarianism, freedom of religion, indeed tradition—are deep ones, but some of them have been exaggerated. Many have been handled more subtly elsewhere—violence and threats against women, for example, are not limited to Muslims and are illegal throughout the Western world. But for the majority of the French, the idea that a separate identity with such upsetting practices might exist within being French and the fact that that identity is a nonsecular, religious one violating the century-old compromise have become intolerable. And French intolerance, intensified by economic failure, has bred *Maghrebian* separatism and further movement away from assimilation and toward Islamic fundamentalism.

The cultural and religious gap has been widened by the problems of economics and the unprecedented size of the new wave of immigrants. Perhaps, had *les trente glorieuses* been extended to *soixante glorieuses*—sixty years of rapid economic growth and low unemployment—the *Maghrebians* would have been absorbed into the population, the action-reaction would not have begun, and the cultural differences could have been overcome. That, of course, did not happen.

Neither has French policy helped bring the mass of newcomers into the economic mainstream. France has engaged in little of what Americans call "affirmative action." As controversial as such positive discrimination in economic and other areas is in the United States, it runs even more strongly against the single-nation philosophy of the French.

To be sure, French pragmatism has allowed occasional small exceptions to that philosophy. Jewish and Protestant schools, as well as Catholic schools, receive some state aid. And the Jewish community, as such, has an officially recognized representative organization. But France has relatively few Jews, and Vichy-based French guilt has allowed them special treatment. The attempt to extend somewhat similar treatment to Muslims illustrates the importance of numbers and the tardiness and clumsiness of French policy.

In 2002, long after the youth crime and drug problems had festered, as the controversy over head scarves had begun to build, and as Islamic rage toward Israel—and, in France in many cases, toward Jews—was increasing, the government pulled together three very different Muslim organizations, ranging from modern assimilationist to Islamic fundamentalist, into a single "French Council of the Muslim Religion," making sure of course that the leadership was of the first tendency. This example of traditional French statism, which extends far into the economic and political, as well as the cultural, spheres, has not worked very well.¹⁷ Attempting to make up for lost time, during which the lack of French-oriented imams (religious leaders) had led to an influx of frequently fundamentalist imams from abroad, for instance, the new Muslim council, aided by the not very hidden hand of the government, is now trying to figure out how to train imams in France. In this case, statism and pragmatism are overriding secularism. And the going is slow, clumsy, and controversial.

The impossibility of assimilating 6 million individuals and the unwillingness to make the compromises necessary to bring them in as a group have led to predictable failures. Looking at the same indicators as for the American immigrant groups, after 40 years of large-scale immigration, longer than that of mass Latino immigration into the United States,

- *Maghrebian* Muslims are not diffusing from their own neighborhoods in any significant number.
- They are not moving into the mainstream economy in any significant number. Muslim managers are a true curiosity.
- They hardly participate in French politics or government. This may be the most significant point of all. With 10 percent of the population being Muslim, the number of Muslim deputies in the French National Assembly is zero. The recent promotion of one of the few Muslim bureaucrats to the powerful position of prefect of a French region has been disputed as a shocking example of affirmative action, as have various efforts to broaden the student bodies of various prestigious educational institutions, including those leading to high careers in the bureaucracy.¹⁸ And the token Muslim junior minister—in a subcabinet post with few duties—recently quit in disgust to run for the European Parliament.
- Neither, as noted, is French culture changing to allow any significant entry of Muslim elements. For a brief moment, France celebrated its black-brown-white World

¹⁷ One Muslim electronic publication headlined its story, "Sarkozy [the then–Interior Minister who imposed the restructuring] determines the Islam of France!" (Saphirnet.info, 2002).

¹⁸ In contrast, for example, about two-thirds of the students in this year's University of California, Berkeley, program of internships in California's state government are from the new immigrant groups.

Cup football team with an Algerian superstar, but that euphoria seems to have faded; pop music has assimilated some *Maghrebian* elements and stars; and slang from the *banlieues* has spread to some extent into French teenage culture. French households do cook *couscous* occasionally. Perhaps these are harbingers. But classical French culture remains rigid, and mainstream popular culture shows little change.

- The Muslim population keeps increasing. Although one prediction, by an extreme American anti-Muslim Catholic group, that “sometime after the year 2020, at the current rate the Muslim population will overtake the native French European population” (Ciaccio, 2002) is based on an unlikely extrapolation, that is the direction. Something has got to give.

Americans like Huntington make similar predictions about coming Latino majorities. For the United States as a whole, these seem exaggerated; for California and some other states, they are not at all and are not far distant. That should not be worrisome, however: The tree will be bent into a very different shape from the sapling of 1776. But it will be the same American tree.

The French tree retains its classical form, but the new winds may well break it. Without assimilation of its growing Muslim population, France will become at best an Athenian democracy: the progenitor of democracy was democratic for its citizens, but not for its slaves and other outsiders. But even that limited “best” may not be achievable in the modern world. Much more ominous is an Israeli-style democracy, with the disenfranchised class in revolt. And since France is a major part of Europe and since other European nations, large and small, face similar—if numerically smaller—migrations, the problems and the dangers are likely to affect the European Union as a whole.

The Relevance and Limits of Public Policy

One lesson from the American experience is that policy is relatively weak in the face of massive immigration. To be sure, the long pause that started with the legal restrictions of 1924 did cut the inflow deeply. But, as noted, that was aided by the width of two oceans, which are far more daunting than the fences on the Mexican border and even the Mediterranean, crisscrossed as it is by large and small vessels, aircraft, and commerce.

American policy has embraced the melting pot ideal—turning the immigrants’ “children [into] culturally assimilated Americans”—as Pfaff phrased it. The schools taught “Americanism,” and the pupils learned it, but government never enforced it in any way parallel to the French anti-scarf restriction. To be sure, historically and in recent years, individual states have passed laws declaring English to be the official—or the only acceptable—language, but these have been largely ignored. The courts have limited the ability of states to restrict eligibility for benefits, even for illegal immigrants. California is in the midst of a controversy over driving licenses for illegals—but in any case, they continue to drive.

Overall, the United States has a perhaps illogical—but working—mix of restriction, neutrality, and encouragement to immigration and assimilation. The most certain thing is that the Mexicans and other Latinos, and the Asians, are here and form a significant proportion of the population. Almost as certain is that the proportion will increase, no matter what the limitations.

“Stronger” policies may slow the increase: Whether increased border enforcement is worth the deaths in the desert is an arguable question.¹⁹ Closing the economic gap between Mexico (and Central America) and the United States may slow the influx, but that is a very long-run proposition. English-only laws or restrictions on bilingual education might possibly speed assimilation (or slow it down).

Nonetheless, “steady as she goes” seems to be not only the best course for the United States but the only possible course. Huntington may decry it all, but history suggests that policy is going to change little. Fortunately, American history also suggests that it need not.

France is headed in its own direction, trying to restrict mass immigration while eschewing the adaptive steps that would be necessary to assimilate it. And perhaps, by extension, Europe is too. Can changed policy change the direction?

The frequent and unwelcome American answer to such questions about France and Europe—“Sure. Be more like us”—would be fatuous at best. Three redirections may be within the realm of French philosophical acceptance and political possibility, however:

- **Affirmative action.** The controversies over the Muslim prefect and admissions into institutions of higher education show both that *discrimination positive* is difficult and that it is within the realm of consideration. Indeed, affirmative action against gender discrimination is a serious official policy—which of course deepens the French mistrust of Islam. Nonetheless, special consideration for Muslims—within the political parties and within the bureaucracy, as well as across the employment spectrum—may be possible, although it would certainly be easier with unemployment nearer 5 than 10 percent.
- **An end to negative action.** The rights and wrongs of the dispute over the head scarf are arguable, and have been argued *ad infinitum* in the kind of dispute over high principle beloved by the French. There can be no doubt, however, that the dispute itself has made the prospects for assimilation worse. Future occasions for such measures and debates should be avoided. The final suggestion might help in this regard.
- **Focusing on enforcing basic laws.** Violence against females and mutilation are quite illegal in all Western states, and discrimination is against the law in most of them. Such violence and discrimination are hardly confined to Muslims. Laws embodying basic liberal Western mores should be stressed and strictly enforced across the board.²⁰

Steps such as these would not bring about assimilation in the strong definition set forth at the beginning of this paper—newcomers becoming almost indistinguishable from natives—but would at least move toward the weakest definition—“sufficient similarity and overlap between new and old to keep the peace.”

France is now moving in the opposite direction.

¹⁹ Whether the United States can sustain the overall rapid population growth to which immigration is a major contributor is a different question from that of changing ethnic mix. So is the potential contribution of the youthful demography of immigrant groups to the support of aging western populations. It may help in the United States, and might in Europe, but as one recent European study (Grant et al., 2004) suggests, not very much, given current projections for future immigration.

²⁰ To be sure, the anti-scarf law is written impartially; Jewish skullcaps, “large” jewelry crucifixes, and, after some debate, Sikh turbans are equally outlawed. But the use of the adjective “large” indicates more concern for Catholic sensibilities than for those of the real targets, Muslims. In any case, the law forbids a symptom, not the subordination of women many French claim to be the real problem.

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OP-132-RC

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ISBN 0-8330-3669-6



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